

Valley Women's Voice

NOVEMBER 1994

A Chronicle of Feminist Thought and Action

Scary Dykes in Work Boots

or Why Bashing P.C. Lesbians of Yesteryear Is Now Cool
By C.E. Atkins

What's so bad about '70's radical feminism? According to the younger feminists and dykes of today, the feminism of twenty years ago was a nasty brew of man-hating and puritanism. The bashing of '70's feminists by twenty-somethings has reached almost epidemic proportions as the media scrambles to define the new "lesbian chic"; a hipper, more palatable version of women loving women than separatist colonies may have offered.

What exactly IS a '70's lesbian feminist and why are these women being criticized so viciously? Did '70's lesbians, feminists, and lesbian feminists really take ALL the fun out of sex? Was their sense of fashion as atrocious as it is now being presented??

In the *Newsweek* article on lesbians, a Northampton, MA woman described her town twenty years ago as a "pretty radical, pretty scary community... the politically correct uniform was flannel shirts and work boots."

What's so scary about flannel shirts? I've got a closet full of them and I was only two years old in 1970. Any woman who's ever put on a pair of work boots knows that it's a lot easier to hike in the woods wearing work boots than most any other kind of shoe. Psychologically, work boots have helped to make me feel stronger when I'm walking down the street at night. Lots of work boots have reinforced, steel toes ideal for kicking. The only people who should find work boots scary are the men who plan on attacking a woman.

Ten Percent Magazine, a national gay and lesbian glossy, recently featured an article on Dorothy Atcheson—"lesbian, feminist, and editor at *Playboy Magazine*..." Atcheson is quick to draw distinction between herself and the radical lesbians of yesteryear: "Most people think lesbian feminists are throwbacks to the '70's who hate sex, who hate men, and who hate pornography. Lesbians these days tend to be very pro-sex. *Playboy* has always tried to be about sexual freedom for men and women." (*Ten Percent*, June, 1994)

Strangely enough, radical lesbian feminism now includes an absolute reversal of the ideologies which inhabited '70's feminism. In the 1990's you can be a lesbian feminist and love men and love porn and love (patriarchally defined) sex. I'm starting to feel defensive about the word feminist as well as for the women who loved and lived as '70's dykes and turned ideas manufactured by patriar-

chy upside down. I'm feeling nostalgic for the time and the piece of the feminist movement that wrestled brilliantly with questions and was comfortable with its anger towards men.

Not only is '70's lesbian feminist bashing unpleasant, it is also, at times, simply wrong. Women bitter at having been made to examine their oppression have chosen to rewrite history as a way of revenge. In a *Cosmopolitan* article on feminism, Diane Baroni laments: "another strident voice in the in the feminist movement - and one that's made most of us equally uncomfortable - has been that of militant lesbians. For a long time, they got in there and pretty much tried to take over. Feminism became an arena to give THEM recognition, status and ways of fighting homophobia...we didn't have much rapport with that acutely hostile crowd."

About what we'd expect from *Cosmo*, but also quoted in the same issue is '90's feminist icon Naomi Wolf, who likewise dismisses '70's politics for being both angry and immature: "Sleeping with men. Is that sleeping with the enemy? Some feminists believe that it is. As the feminist movement grows more mature and understanding of our enemies more nuanced, three terms assumed to be in contradiction - radical, feminist, heterosexuality - can and must be brought together."

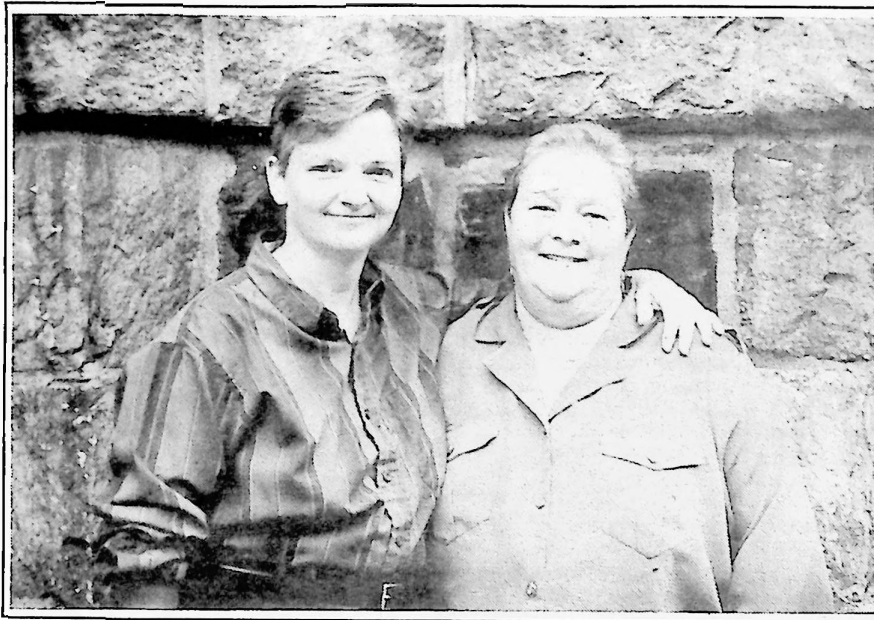
Wolf's naming of the choice to remain celibate or to sleep with other women rather than men as immature bears a striking resemblance to an earlier assertion by Freud that lesbian sexuality is merely a warm-up to the Real Thing. Add to the list of angry, poorly dressed, and asexual, "immature"; not capable of adult relationships and somehow regressive. In sorting out all this bashing of the radical lesbians whose vitality and intelligence was so essential to the second wave of feminism, a few things seem evident. The elements that seems "scary" about '70's feminism are scary because they challenge male rule. My guess is that not a lot of men would feel threatened or offended by a radical lesbian under the *Playboy* payroll.

In THE BOSTON PHOENIX, writer Liz Galst's "Radical Lesbian Feminists" draws a portrait of a new generation of lesbians who are often ambivalent about feminism: "Indeed it is common for many young lesbians today to view the lesbian feminism of 15 years ago as having had a single agenda-

to identify the entire lesbian community with boring, P.C. sex.... never mind the founding of battered women's shelters, lesbian custody projects, women's bookstores, and white women's anti-racist groups."

Lesbians and feminists seem to be on a kind of apologetic rampage, trying desperately to disassociate with the male-hating image that many '70's women embraced and even rejoiced in. Even the hit lesbian film *GO FISH* bears evidence to this apology. One of the more butch central characters, a lesbian Casanova of sorts, sleeps with a man. The message: Don't worry men; no matter how butch we look or how angry we are, you will always have access to us. As a twenty-something radical lesbian feminist, I've found that a lot of lesbians in my generation want life to be easy. Everyone wants to believe that the battles fought twenty years ago are won and that we can move on towards some bright horizon. Many of us have spent a good part of our formative years in the apathetic, consumption crazed '80's. The political climate we are most familiar with consisted of Reaganomics and jellybeans. The rage students in the '60's experienced seems to have fizzled out into a kind of cynical disgust.

As I make my way in the world, I find that women have yet to achieve the full status of "human" in our culture. The 1990's, like the 1960's, is a time of male dominance that depends on the subjugation of women. Perhaps we have retreated, overwhelmed, into our own niches and taken cover. I can't tell if the feminist movement right now is a pressure cooker or simply a pot on the stove without a flame. What I do know is that I'm tired of the feminism that's making the press lately with its wishy-wash politics and un-threatening spokeswomen. The dismissal of '70's feminist ideologies may just turn out to be as foolish as handing over the jailer the keys to our cage.



Wanda and Brenda Henson

photograph by Marilyn Humphries

You're Next

The title of this article is the title the Hensons hope to use for the book they're writing with Phyllis Chesler. *Lesbians for Lesbians and the Northampton Society of Friends* brought the Hensons to speak at Smith College on Sept. 29, 1994. This article is from that night's talk. See this issue's newsbriefs for more recent news.

If It Was Wrong We'd Talk About It—Brenda

Brenda and Wanda Henson met almost 11 years ago doing abortion clinic defense and working in the battered women's shelter in Biloxi. Shortly after that they attended The 2nd Southern Women's Music Festival and discovered Feminist-Lesbian Culture. Determined to bring this culture back to Mississippi, they mortgaged their house and opened Southern Wildsisters Unlimited, a bookstore. From meetings at the bookstore, Feminists formed an "underground railroad" to hide young girls from court-mandated visitations with fathers who perpetrated incest. They protested the shutdown of a displaced homemakers program, and of the office of the Health Department that served Biloxi's Vietnamese community. They started a food bank, managed by the people it serves. In their spare time, Brenda got a BA in Criminal Justice, and Wanda got a BA in Nursing; then they both got M.Ed.s in Adult Education. With technical advice from Therese Edell, and a sound system bought with donations from two Northern dykes, Brenda and Wanda produced a 10 concert tour to bring women's music to the deep south, including a Lesbian Cabaret with Sue Fink at the Mobile Symphony Hall. When that tour

continued on page 3

POLICY STATEMENT

The *Valley Women's Voice*, a monthly feminist newsjournal, welcomes women's writings, poetry, graphics, and photography that reflect a feminist commitment to the empowerment of all women. The *Voice* provides a forum for women to share challenging and controversial ideas. We aim to communicate and strengthen bonds between women by making them visible in our pages.

The *Valley Women's Voice* is produced on a collective, consensus, volunteer basis by a group of feminists. We do not agree with all opinions expressed in the *Voice* by individual authors, but we accept responsibility for choosing to print everything in the paper. All copyrights reserved to authors/artists.

CONTRIBUTION GUIDELINES

The *Valley Women's Voice* welcomes letters, essays, narratives, interviews, newsbriefs, poems, short stories, cartoons, graphics, and photographs. Written submissions should be 3 to 5 pages typed, *double spaced*. Your name, address, and phone number must be enclosed with all materials so that we may verify submissions and/or contact you to discuss

any necessary editorial changes. A short biographical statement is also appreciated. An author who does not wish her name to be printed should indicate this when submitting items. Please enclose a SASE if you would like materials returned to you. Submissions typed on disk are greatly appreciated. We use Microsoft Word 4.0, and our computer accepts double density disks, *not* high density. You may fax articles or calendar/announcement listings to us at (413)545-4751 (please clearly indicate VWV on each page). The decision to print materials is made collectively, and all major editorial changes are made in conjunction with the author. However, we reserve the right to make minor editorial corrections to submissions for purposes of clarity and space constraints. Although we cannot afford to pay contributors, we do send a complimentary copy of the issue in which your item appears.

Send submissions to: *Valley Women's Voice*, 321 Student Union Building, University of Massachusetts, Amherst, MA 01003. If you have ideas for future articles, or are not sure how your particular interests and talents may add to the paper, call us and let's discuss the possibilities. Our number is (413)545-2436.

CALENDAR AND ANNOUNCEMENT LISTINGS

The *Valley Women's Voice* would like to print announcements and publicize events of interest to women. Listings are free and should be kept to 5 lines in length. (Items will be edited to fit space constraints.) Announcements for nonprofit organizations will be given preference and additional space when it is available.

We request that Calendar listings provide the following information: name, date, time, and location of the event; cost of attending the event (sliding scale? Work exchange?); the sponsor of the event and recipient of proceeds, if any; a statement about accessibility for disabled women (wheelchair accessible? ASL interpreted?); a phone number where inquiries may be directed.

Individuals and organizations may request that a photograph be printed along with a Calendar listing. A nominal fee is charged to cover printing costs. Only black-and-white photographs can be accepted. Due to space constraints, we may not be able to accept all photographs for publication, and preference will be given to nonprofit organizations.

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Heidi Creamer - taping project
Yohah Ralph - artwork
Margaret Langdell - photography

thanks also to E.C.,
a helpful sister

Corrections:

In the October 1994 issue of the *Valley Women's Voice* an incorrect address was given to obtain copies of Susan Stinson's first book *Belly Songs: In Celebration of Fat Women*. The correct address to obtain that book and to contact Susan Stinson for info on readings and workshops is: Susan Stinson, c/o Orogeny Press, P.O. Box 433, Northampton, MA 01061. The book's cover artist is Jody Kim.

These words should be omitted from the "Stone" poem that appeared in the October issue: "steamy" and "with her body".

We regret that we omitted crediting photographer Margaret Langdell for photos on pages 1 and 4 of last month's issue.

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You're Next

continued from page 1

was successful, they started the Gulf Coast Women's Music Festival. **When You're Working Class-Poor, what you need is the tools to work with—Wanda**

After 4 years of the festival they were in great need of a safe and permanent home for the festival. They had been fund-raising and had \$10,000. They wanted a place where educational workshops could go on. A bookstore hadn't worked, women didn't have the money to buy books, but the information had to be available. So Wanda wrote a grant to the Lesbian Natural Resources Foundation and they got a grant for almost \$14,000 for a down payment. After a long search they found 120 acres for \$60,000. It had 5 barns and a "house-like structure" that they are building into a house. A stream runs through the property, and it has many different soil types, hills, ravines, and all kinds of wildflowers. After they bought the land, the two of them, and their adult daughter, Andi began to spend time on the land. Cheri Michael, a friend of theirs, basically moved onto the land, and was often there by herself. **They'd had 500 hogs and the sewer ran straight into the creek, nobody ever complained. Get a load of that. We buy the property and three dykes move onto the land and within 3 months...—Wanda**

Andrea Gibbs, the Henson's adult daughter, founded Victim's Voice, an organization that investigates police brutality. Along with Ben Chaney, of the James Earl Chaney Foundation, she investigated 55 very questionable suicides in 18 Mississippi jails. Eventually the U. S. Justice Dept. reprimanded 11 of the 18, shutting 4 of them down. One jail that was shut down had such severe human rights abuses that the county was fined. That county was the Free State of Jones where several months later the Hensons purchased Camp Sister Spirit.

The police had illegally searched Andi's home, ransacked her belongings and threatened her dog. On November 9, 1993, Cheri and Andi found a dead dog that had been shot in the stomach tied to the mailbox. There were kotex napkins wrapped around it and a 9mm bullet hole in the mailbox. As Brenda and Wanda were speeding toward the camp they assumed the police were further harassing their daughter. Andi photographed the dead dog on the mailbox and waited for the police. By the time an officer showed up the dog had fallen. So in the officer's report he denied that the dog had been on the mailbox and also that he had picked up two bullet casings and put them in his pocket.

Welcome to the Free State of Jones—Wanda

Several days later Brenda was being interviewed by the local news. They pointedly asked about her "Lesbian Vision" for the camp. After the interview they told her that copies of the Grapevine, their newsletter, were being handed out in all the local churches and the Ellisville grocery store parking lot. That's when the obscene phone calls, death threats, and gunshots started. They began taping phone calls and got caller ID. On Xmas night, 1993, their son, Arthur caught someone making a threat to kill them by morning. In the morning, after a terrifying night of waiting, the clerk of the courts told them they could come down and swear out a

felony warrant, for using the phone service to deliver a death threat. By the time they drove the 15 minutes to the court house the charges had been dropped to misdemeanor harassment, the man eventually paid a fine of \$149. Unlike a feminist who called James Hendry of Mississippians for Family Values and argued with him on the phone, she was immediately jailed with a \$1,000 bond.

This is not the good people of Mississippi—Brenda

The Mississippians for Family Values is the group inciting these hate crimes. It's a coalition of 18 Baptist ministers associated with the religious right. The Baptist minister of Overt is not involved. They are lead by businessman James Hendry, Rev. Allen, and a lawyer Paul Wiley. They've held two meetings to "Run these Women Out of Town!". The first meeting had 250 people bussed in from 3-4 churches (Overt only has a pop. of 200). The Sheriff was there as well as State Rep. Mike Parker. Among other things said at that meeting was "it's time to get the white sheets out".

After the first town meeting they went on the Oprah Show. Brenda and Wanda had high hopes, expecting a fair hearing from Oprah. Instead they were kept totally on the defensive, not even allowed to explain their aims, but instead had to respond endlessly to the right wing. Meanwhile, when brought face to face with the bigots, they realized that James Hendry had been stalking them and their property for months before starting his hate group. During a commercial break a woman from Beverly La Hays group, Concerned Women of America (the largest women's group in this country that has \$4 million more than NOW) cornered Wanda pointed and hissed "there is nothing to protect you." Wanda said she realized the woman was right, "there's not a law on the books to protect me only the power of my breath."

At the second town meeting there were 400 people. They showed the right wing film "The Gay Agenda". The TV show 20/20 was there and filmed the sheriff holding a bucket to collect donations for the "defense committee" to run Camp Sister Spirit out of town. Both meetings were held at the courthouse, where although they had to take the signs down, they still kept one water fountain painted white and one painted black. (Until Wanda pointed it out to every reporter and they started filming it all the time) After the meetings Mississippians for Family Values began holding rallies with pony rides, cotton candy and bake sales. They raffled off guns and afghans. Brenda explains the situation this way, "I out of 3 women in Mississippi can't write; Mississippi has the nations highest rates of teen pregnancy and infant mortality; 1 in 4 of Mississippi's kids goes to bed hungry every night; then take these people and frighten them with these damn videos and these horror stories, myths and rumors."

There are no good queers and bad queers—Wanda

A woman had been calling them from town since they started. She was a closeted lesbian and she just didn't see what the problem was. She had been a founder of the Jayceettes and she was on the board of the volunteer fire dept. and believed if you just stayed in your place and did things right nothing would happen to you. But she and her lover's first names had been in a list of "thank you's" in the newsletter that

was stolen. The community thought they were a part of Camp Sister Spirit. For three months they were hounded. The caller's lover left town rather than come out. Finally their house was burned down by unknown arsonists and the local insurance company is refusing to settle the claim.

After great pressure from the Gay and Lesbian Task Force, Janet Reno sent in Federal Mediators, Mississippians for Family Values refused mediation and sued the Justice Department. That did nothing to help the Hensons. The Hensons's said that in the beginning it was mainly gay men who came forward with money and their friends from the battered women's movement who heard them, believed them and did something fast. They also recognized community organizer Susanne Pharr and Robin Kane of NGLTF. The Highlander Center, that was an important part of the African-American civil rights struggle, also reached out and made Camp Sister Spirit part of a coalition of folk schools that teach social justice and wrote to Clinton on their behalf. As honored as they were the support didn't overshadow the fear and hate. As of the night they spoke here, there had been over 64 different hate crimes committed against Camp Sister Spirit. Wanda said, "I wish you'd come and walk with me and witness what's happening to us. You walk around with a walkie-talkie and have to maintain communication. Forget going anywhere by yourself anymore." She shared a poem from Home Girls, the black feminist anthology that was one of the first feminist books she read.

The poem, written by the late Pat Parker reads in part:

....& it won't matter
if you're

homosexual, not a faggot
lesbian, not a dyke
gay, not queer

It won't matter
if you

own your business
have a good job
or are on S.S.I.

It won't matter
if you're

Black
Chicano
Native American
Asian
or white

It won't matter
if you're from

New York
or Los Angeles.
Galveston
or Sioux Falls

...
They will come
They will come
to the cities
and to the land
to your front rooms
and in *your* closets.

They will come for
the perverts
and where will
you be
When they come?

Wanda then said "I want leave you with the idea that they have come for me, for my family, for my friends, for my right to advocate Feminism." and ended by singing for us her version of Holly Near's Mountain Song. "...and they ain't gonna take my dream away, Not without me fighting, No they ain't gonna take my dream away."

Stop the Christian Terrorists

by Kate Moran

Many of us sit in Women's Studies or STPEC Classes and talk about what we would do to change the world. Everyone insists that if it were Freedom Summer, they'd be headed for Mississippi. Well, it's time to go. Brenda and Wanda need help. Every time they have to venture off the land alone they are in great danger, if they are not alone they are in a lot less danger of being chased, harassed, or shot at. In the 80's people who sought peace and justice went to Nicaragua to harvest coffee, as "witnesses for peace". Now it's time to work and witness in our own country. Camp Sister Spirit has built bunkhouses for both women and men. Students have come not only from this country, but all over the world. Two women from East and West Berlin came and helped build a recycled tin fence, writing their names on the wall side by side. The Hensons asked publishers for books to help in education and were sent 1,500 titles. Now they need a building to keep the books safely. They need help clearing land, filing, and cooking. They ask for \$5 a night or \$25 a week to cover food while volunteers are working. If UMASS could send 2 busses to the March on Washington, certainly we can get a bus together to help the Hensons. Those of you at the other 4 colleges, some of the most affluent colleges in the country, could find some money somewhere for a bus to Mississippi.

Intercession is the logical time to go. Is there a Women's Studies or STPEC department willing to offer us credit to really do something? And local readers there is no reason you have to be a student, they need help now and they need it from anyone. Certainly Lesbians are more affluent and free here than almost anywhere in the world. It's time to give back what we can. They have T-shirts for sale, a list of equipment they need and cash donations are tax deductible.

I'm aware that the risks involved in going to Mississippi are very different for people of color and disabled people, that we can't all go now, but some of us must go. I believe that this is a test of the Lesbian-Feminist Movement. If we can't protect two good-hearted dykes trying to feed people and teach women to read on a pig farm in Mississippi, then we might as well deconstruct our movement and go home. Please contact me, Kate Moran, at the Valley Women's Voice Office 545-2436 if you want to help with this project. By the time you see this paper we will be organizing, hopefully in the next paper we will be announcing our plans.

Wanda and Brenda Henson
can be contacted at:

Camp Sister Spirit
PO Box 12
Overt, MS, 39464
(601) 344-1411
(601) 344-2005



Editorial

by Michelle DePesa

Do you (or anyone) think that I would work for Burger King if I were not being paid?

Even a couple of hours a week? No, of course I wouldn't. No one would. But the people who do work there smile at you, say "Welcome to Burger King! Enjoy your meal! Please come again!" They collect a paycheck every Friday and must say those things. Do you think they really welcome you to BK? No, they don't give a rat's ass if you stop in or drive by. Do you think they really care that you "come again"? No, they don't. Do you think that most people, especially young people, actually advocate enjoying such a high-fat, high cholesterol meal with little if any nutritional value? I doubt it. Many people I know who work in fast food don't ever eat the food there. But just because they may even disagree with the message implied in the atmosphere of the establishment, the buttons they have to wear, or the corny things they have to say doesn't mean they're not going to keep the job. Work is work, after all. When someone dies of heart disease from a lifetime of burgers and fries, do the relatives run into a fast food establishment and blame the workers who served (with a smile) their dearly departed? No, of course not. And no one would say that the people employed at the establishment actively endorse the food or the demeaning job, never mind the fact that they are doing it "for the money." Everyone seems to know they are (like many of us) exploited labor on the capitalist food chain.

We all seem to know that "Mr." BK is the one who thinks up those ads, puts the words in the em-

ployees mouths, and who has a vested interest in hard selling his product.

So why is it that if a woman "decides" (this term is disputable) to appear in a pornographic magazine or film that it is any different? Do people automatically assume that the woman believes in what she is supposed to say/do just because she does it? It's almost as if the payment she receives is just an added bonus, as if a woman would do that sort of work if it wasn't financially rewarding.

The popular belief, and one porn apologists frequently resort to, is that the woman herself thought up the idea of "posing" and that "Hey, I can make money too - make money doing what I love!" The notion being that, also, women might do it even if there was no paycheck. What they don't realize is that because of the very nature of pornography, the "off stage" attitude of the "model" or "actress," that she "loves" her "work" is still part of the job.

People who work in government are not allowed to criticize the government in their spare time. Part of the job is remaining visibly "patriotic."

Reality check: The driving force behind pornography's immense sales is that it is "real". It is not "just harmless fantasy". It is, to the men who buy it, a depiction of real female sexuality, of female desire, of female will. This is what sets it apart from traditional "acting" and other B.S. sales jobs. She is paid for her smile on stage and off, whether she herself realizes it or not. Yet somehow people believe that because there is no (visible) force used, that the woman "chooses" this "career." The idea of "choice" implies that there is some other viable option. And the people who work at low paid, degrading fast food jobs, or those who apply for welfare, or leave their homes to go to a shelter to escape a violent partner also "choose" to do so.

1994 Second Women's Conference

featuring

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by **Ninotchka Rosca**, former political prisoner and exile, founder of the GABRIELA network and author of five books

and

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Missing Children

Anguish as shadows (three babies)
brush my arms.

Disarming images as Spirit
visited me.
The Will of Heaven.

Unheavenly anger as sacred
notches on material form.

Formless ether rising as The Unknowable
I Am.
And I will be
above it all
until
my babies fill my arms again.

by Aisha Gabriel



Aisha Gabriel

Protection

Even as I speak
I swallow the words.
You cannot hear
this much pain.
So, I pull the
sounds down.
They weave
through me.
My body cramps
in the middle.
Doubling over I
realize how much
I keep.

Tammaira J. Ward 1993

I'm as motherless as a sea turtle's egg.
I crack the shell, leaving the poisoned
husk on the sandy shores she's chosen.
I crawl out, inching my way to the sea.
The tide takes me.

Tammaira J. Ward 1992

Come Out

It is possible to procrastinate Faith
It is possible to contaminate yourself
which is why smart girls always wipe front to back.

It is possible to both drive and cry
It is possible to want your Self and Him
which is why smart girls must be strong and brave.

It is possible to despise your own flesh
It is possible to avoid your own gaze
which is why smart girls must kiss the air around them.

It is possible to dream you are in a tree
It is possible to be terrified by height
which is why smart girls spring from the crook.

It is possible to still suck your thumb
It is possible to sing loud silent songs
which is why smart girls find their voices and sing praises.

Smart Girl . . .

Smart Girl . . .

Come out where we can see you!
It's been too many years of playing dumb.

by Madeleine Charney

bell hooks

Well-known black feminist author bell hooks came to UMass September 27th and spoke to a full house at Bowker Auditorium. bell hooks is the author of 8 books, including *Ain't No Woman: Black Women and Feminism*; *Yearning: Race, Gender and Cultural Politics*; and her most recent book *Teaching to Transgress: Education as the Practice of Freedom*. She is most known for her analysis of how race, gender and class intersect to create oppression in society, and her insistence that feminists of color be brought to the center of critical discourse. She has also stood up to the criticism of traditional theorists, who claim that her use of personal narrative and experience in her work renders her analysis less than rigorous. Through her writing, she has championed the feminist belief that "the personal is political."

"If black women and white women continue to express fear and rage without a commitment to move on through these emotions in order to explore new grounds for contact, our efforts to build an inclusive women's movement will fail. Much depends on the strength of our commitment to feminist process and feminist movement. There have been so many feminist occasions where differences surface, and with them expressions of pain, rage, hostility. Rather than coping with these emotions and continuing to probe intellectually and search for insight and strategies of confrontation, all avenues for discussions become blocked and no dialogue occurs. I am confident that women have the skills (developed in interpersonal relations where we confront gender difference) to make productive space for critical dissent dialogue even as we express intense emotion. We need to examine why we suddenly lose the capacity to exercise skill and care when we confront one another across



bell hooks

race and class differences. It may be that we give up so easily with one another because women have internalized the racist assumption that we can never overcome the barrier separating white and black women. If this is so then we are seriously complicit. To counter this complicity, we must have more written work and oral testimony documenting ways barriers are broken down, coalitions formed, and solidarity shared. It is this evidence that will renew our hope and provide strategies and direction for future feminist movement." pp. 109-110, *Teaching to Transgress*

bell hooks is currently a professor at City University of New York.

Survivor's Circle is a space for women survivors of child abuse (sexual, emotional, physical) to share their thoughts, poetry, stories, resources, etc. If you know of a conference, workshop, or other event of special interest to survivors please let us know! We welcome submissions of all sorts. If you have any questions, comments, or suggestions please feel free to contact the VWV at (413) 545-2436.

The Identity of Survival

by Tammaira J. Ward

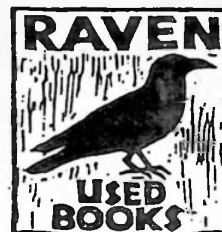
There are many questions we ask during the course of our lives. The latest question I've been contemplating, as usual, strings along many more as I turn it on end. My starting point is the query of what my personality would have been if I hadn't been sexually abused? I am entertaining the thought that I would have had much more time to explore my life. As it was, I needed to be strong to exist. Exploration fell by the wayside when I needed to plunge into the hardest aspects of adulthood. I missed the dreams, security and untethered hope other children possessed to find out about their inner and outer worlds. If I had been left in the world of a child what would my dreams be? Has my personality been altered by the absence of attainable avenues in which my dreams could exist?

All these questions churn with ambiguity within me because they will never have a real testing ground. The only ground I knew then was the fail-safe base I made to endure the many terrors of sexual abuse. I've come to the conclusion that part of this base has proved very useful in my present life. For instance, my directness has led me through many unpleasant binds. My boldness brazened by the flight from abuse allows me to undertake and accomplish

tasks I might have forsaken otherwise.

Although I wonder about what I would have been, given the opportunity and time, I must live with the me I've become and doing that requires the unabashed acceptance of every part of me. I work on that me consciously to actively attain my dreams, secure my purposeful existence, and I keep my hopes close within my soul to spur my dreams. Part of the work I need to do to attain the above is very time consuming, often deeply depressing, as well as gnawing. All those defenses I needed to survive I find do not serve me well in my present world. I no longer need to be hyper-vigilant of the purposes of all the people I'm in contact with, but somehow I find myself doing just that. In another case, the constant inner berating I initiate that used to keep me on my toes, now only dwindles the softly breathing fires of my self-esteem.

At this point, the work that is done cannot be forgotten because it constantly takes another shape and needs to be reaffirmed. The work that awaits me, I tackle to the capacity that my humanness allows. I've survived the abuse and my life has taken shape from that survival. I will meet my future as this me that formed, in part, from much suffering, knowing that there are many parts of me yet to discover. I won't again wait for or permit the world to force my direction.



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HERBS FOR WOMEN'S HEALTH

[Note: the law requires this disclaimer. This column is meant for informational purposes only, and is not intended to replace the advice of a medical practitioner. Should you use this information without the approval of your physical, you are prescribing for yourself, which (at time of press) is still your constitutional right, by the author and Valley Women's Voice collective can assume no responsibility.]

In these days of loud public debate over health care reform, one topic we rarely hear mentioned is that of "alternative" medicine. The fight over who should have access to health care, and who should profit, seems to deliberately obscure the fact that many effective therapies for virtually every ailment are available at low cost to anyone willing to learn about them.

Herbalism is one such therapy. In past societies, the knowledge of the medicinal properties of plants formed the basis of the art of healing, an art practiced mainly by women. With the coming of patriarchy and "scientific" medicine, much of this knowledge was lost or destroyed. Men replaced women as the medical experts, and what herbal knowledge survived continues to be scoffed at or ignored by the male-dominated medicine-for-profit establishment. This need not remain the case, however. Herbal knowledge is being rapidly rediscovered, and most herbs are still available at low cost through health food stores, if not in your own backyard.

In order to help inspire women to regain control of their own health, I have decided to write a monthly column describing herbal and perhaps other alternative therapies for common women's health problems. If you have a specific situation which you would like me to address, feel free to send it to me care of the Valley Women's Voice. This month I will discuss just a few common herbs and their effects. This is not meant to be the definitive explanation of the properties of these herbs; rather it is the briefest introduction to some useful healing plants for those who may not have encountered them before. In depth information is available through a variety of sources including books, workshops, and practicing herbalists in the area.

TONICS:

Tonics are herbs which increase vitality, improve overall body function, and increase resistance to pathogens, toxins, and stress. They are indicated for women who feel run down or tired frequently, or who have chronic health problems such as candida albicans or chronic fatigue syndrome.

Siberian Ginseng (*Eleutherococcus senticosus*):

This is not the same plant as Chinese Ginseng (*Panax ginseng*), although the two share some properties. Siberian Ginseng increases energy level and resistance to stress, and is beneficial to women suffering from depression or fatigue. It also strengthens immune function and resistance to disease. As a tonic, take 1-2 ml of tincture daily. (A tincture is an alcohol extract of the herb; it can be placed in a little hot water or tea to evaporate the alcohol if desired.) Siberian Ginseng can be taken long term by any woman without side effects, and is especially good for elderly or infirm women.

Alfalfa (*Medicago sativa*):

This common plant contains almost all known vitamins and minerals, and is especially high in vitamins A and K. It is cleansing and detoxifying to the blood, reducing blood cholesterol and balancing blood pressure. Alfalfa also aids the body in assimilating other herbs. It is completely safe and is useful for almost any condition, especially for women who may be suffering from a nutritional deficiency. A cup of alfalfa tea daily makes an excellent tonic, or use together with other herbal remedies to increase their effectiveness.

IMMUNE STRENGTHENING HERBS:

There are basically two types of herbs for the immune system - surface immune boosters, and

deep, long-term immune system strengtheners. Here I will discuss one of each.

Echinacea (*Echinacea angustifolia*):

Also known as Purple Coneflower, Echinacea is perhaps the most popular immune system herb. It works best as a temporary boost to the immune system during an illness or infection, as it loses effectiveness if taken continuously. It can be used to help heal staph and strep infections, flu, tonsillitis, vaginal infections, the common cold, or almost any infectious condition. Use externally as a poultice for infected wounds. To use internally, start taking 1 ml of tincture 3-4 times daily at the first sign of a cold or illness; after 3 or 4 days reduce to 1-2 ml per day for 3-4 days, then stop for 5 days. Repeat if necessary.

Pau D'Arco:

The bark of this South American tree works to strengthen the immune system and can be taken long term without ill effects. Pau D'Arco is used with such chronic problems as cancer, AIDS, chronic fatigue syndrome, anemia, multiple sclerosis, and candida albicans. One to two ml of tincture taken daily will enhance immune function at a systemic level.

REPRODUCTIVE SYSTEM HERBS:

There are numerous herbs which act on the female reproductive system to strengthen, tonify, promote menstruation, relieve PMS and cramps, and even to induce abortion. Here I will merely touch upon two useful tonics for overall reproductive system health.

Red Raspberry (*Rubus idaeus*):

This common herb, which grows wild across the U.S., is a general tonic for the female reproductive system. It strengthens the womb, prevents miscarriage, regulates the menstrual cycle, relieves morning sickness, eases labor and delivery, and helps reduce PMS and cramping. It is effective drunk daily as a tea, especially during pregnancy.


Don Quai (*Angelica sinensis*):

Also called Tang Kwei, this Chinese herb can be the answer to menstrual problems for women who respond to it. It nourishes female glands, regulates periods, balances hormones and blood pressure, and increases energy. It relieves PMS, cramps, and heavy periods, and is especially useful for menopausal symptoms like hot flashes or vaginal dryness. It can help heal ovarian cysts and breast abscesses, and is safe to take long term. Avoid regular use in pregnancy as it can act as a uterine stimulant. One ml daily can provide these benefits. A small percentage of women may experience nervousness and PMS-like symptoms with this herb - if you get such symptoms, discontinue use.

With this list I have tried to present a brief introduction to a few of the more common or useful herbs available. There are certainly many others which I have not covered here, some of which I hope to describe in future columns.

Herbs are safe and effective to use in conjunction with standard allopathic treatments, or in place of them. As those of us who are not covered by health insurance wait anxiously to see what coverage, if any, may be offered to us through health care reform, we would do well to rediscover women's ancient knowledge of medicinal herbs. These plants are simple to use, cheap to obtain, and surprisingly effective. If you have any questions about this subject, please write to me c/o this paper and I will provide such information as I am able to in next month's column. I hope I may have inspired you to learn more about herbs and see the results for yourself!

Karen Scott has been studying herbal medicine for the last two years. Her long term goals include attending a Naturopathic Medical program, and eventually moving to or co-creating an egalitarian, land-based community.



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Dykes To Watch Out For

by Alison Bechdel



Dykes To Watch Out For

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Rude Girls

the opposite of Miss Manners, for women trying to change what oppresses us all and trying to cope with the day to day harassment, sexism, and obnoxious assumptions that come our way. We love learning about and celebrating what you've done. So send your brave and creative stories and graphics to **Rude Girls** at 321 Student Union Building, UMass, Amherst, 01003.

Dear Rude Girls,

There is a clothing-optional swimming hole, not far from here, which I have been frequenting for the last three summers. A few weeks ago I went there to enjoy what I thought would probably be one of the last warm days we would have for six months.

I was lying out naked in the sun reading and trying to get up the nerve to jump into the water. All of the hippy-skippy boys and grrrls had left, and this skeezy looking middle-aged white man scooted up and set his towel down near mine. He was naked too, and started up a conversation with me, did I go to school around here and so on and so forth... I could tell he was a real slimebag; the type of guy who was probably a business executive by day, and had affairs with young secretaries or came to cruise skinny-dipping places behind his wife's back. I don't think he actually looked me in the EYES once during our conversation. Finally, he smiled at me and said (in a tone of voice which I know he thought to be complimentary), "You know, I just have to tell you, I don't think I've ever seen breasts so large." So I looked him over and said, "Well you know, I don't think I've ever seen a dick so small." Normally size doesn't matter to me, but if a man dishes out a rude comment like that, he'd just better be ready to get a rude comment back. M.R.

Dear M.R.,

Thanks for the great letter. He sure did deserve a rude response, and being such a jerk, he probably did think size was everything and you got him where it hurts. I wish it was still warm enough to swim, and if it were, I bet a depressingly large number of women would be using your comeback. Well, everyone remember for next summer.



News Briefs

Feminist Theater Award

The Women and Theater program of the Association for Theatre in Higher Education announces the winner of the 94 Jane Chambers Playwriting Award is **THE WAITING ROOM** by Lisa Loomer. Local playwright Sarah Dreher's play **OPEN SEASON** received consideration as a finalist in the competition. The award seeks to recognize plays and performance texts created by women which reflect a feminist perspective and provide a majority of opportunities for women performers.

continued on page 8

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CALENDAR

Through November 4: Art Exhibit- "Food for Soul," an exhibit by Valley Women Artists consists of work of professional women artists in the Valley. The show will be on display at the Student Union Art Gallery at UMass. The gallery hours are Monday through Friday 11-4 pm. This event is free and open to the public.

November 3, 8:00 pm: Concert - Ani DiFranco is at Mount Holyoke. Tickets are \$12.

November 3, 7:30 pm: Benefit Concert- Friends of Bosnia announces a Benefit Concert for Bosnia as part of the fund-raising for its Mass Aid Drive this Fall. The concerts will feature a wide array of musicians including: Cliff Eberhardt, Amy Fairchild, Chris Haynes, Peter Nelson, Justina & Joyce, Louise Taylor, Erica Wheeler and Croatia pianist and songwriter Radoslaw Lorkovic. The concert will take place at the First Church at 129 Main Street, Northampton. Tickets will be sold for \$10 (\$12 at the door) and are available in Northampton at Beyond Words Bookstore, Raven Books, State Street Fruit Store and The Northampton Box Office in Thornes, in Amherst at For the Record, in South Hadley at Odyssey Bookshop, in Greenfield at World Eye Bookstore and in Brattleboro at Maple Leaf Music.

November 7, 4:30 pm: Talk- "Love and Solitude in the Novels of Sigrid Undset and Willa Cather", a free talk on a work in progress by Sherrill Harbison of UMass in the Living Room of Dickenson House at Mount Holyoke College.

November 7, 7:00 pm: Meeting- Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition Meeting, Third floor conference room, 16 Center St. Northampton FMI call Ellen Koteen 413-586-2016.

November 8, 7:30 pm: Lecture- "What's Love Got To Do With It?" An Analysis of New Zealand Judges' Attitudes towards Domestic Violence," a free lecture by Ruth Busch of The University of Waikato, New Zealand, at the Dickenson House Living Room on the Mount Holyoke Campus

November 8, 7:30 pm: Film- "Nitrate Kisses" by Barbara Hammer, Funded by the National Endowment for the Arts, "Nitrate Kisses" (1992) documents the sexual lives of Gay and Lesbian couples, and the repressed and marginalized history of Gays and Lesbians in contemporary western culture. Within a broader attack on the NEA, the film was challenged by Pat Robertson's Christian Coalition and Andrea Sheldon of the Traditional Values Coalition for alleged misuse of public funds and pornographic content. (67 min.) Hosted by special guest to the University, from California, filmmaker Barbara Hammer.

November 10-11: Conference - The Everywoman's Center at UMass is sponsoring a Women of Color Conference entitled "In Our Own Image: Women of Color in the Media." Call 545-0883 for more details.

November 12: Symposium- "A Women's Symposium" Berkshire Community College 9am-5pm. Sponsored by Berkshire County NOW. Call 413-448-2669 for more info.

November 13: Brunch - Bisexual Women's Brunches are held one leisurely weekend day each month somewhere in The Happy Valley. The brunches are potluck, smoke-free, and rides are available. For locations and more information call Dasha at 625-9638 or Adelle at 253-2104.

November 14, 4:30 pm: Talk - "Women and AIDS: Gender, Race, Class and Science," a free talk on a work in progress by Michelle Murrain of Hampshire College in the Living Room of the Dickenson House at Mount Holyoke College.

November 15, 7:30 pm: Lecture- "The Naming of The Shrew: Feminism, Animals and Nature", a free lecture by Lynda Birke of the University of Warwick, U. K. at the Dickenson House Living Room on the Mount Holyoke Campus.

November 16, 7:00p. m. Fund-raiser: The World's Eye Bookshop in Greenfield will be donating 20% of all the evenings sales to NELCWIT, the organization that provides services to battered women and children in Franklin County.

November 19: Lesbian Homeshow and Dance - It's the 15th year and the show is back at the Northampton center for the Arts from 10am to 5pm with the finest lesbian made crafts, arts, food body work and other irresistible services. You can be a part of this event. Volunteers are needed to help during the day and also later at the

Homeshow Dance, same day, same place, 8pm to midnight, with DJ Mary V. Call an organizer for more information (508) 544-8023 or (508) 544-8457.

November 21, 4:30 pm: Talk- "Memorializing the Salem Witchcraft Trials: Issues in Gender, Architecture, Legal History and Image," a free talk on a work in progress by Margaret Chisholm of New Haven CT, at the Dickenson House on the Mount Holyoke Campus

November 28-December 2: Film Series - The Everywoman's Center at UMass is sponsoring a brown bag lunch film discussion series entitled "Who Are We Helping? Diverse Services for Women in a Multicultural Community." Following are titles, descriptions and dates of the films to be shown:

-November 28, "Who Will Cast the First Stone?" Addresses women's struggle in Pakistan

-November 29, "Shades," Addresses racism based on variations in skin color within the African-American community

-November 30, "Just Because of Who We Are," Addresses homophobic violence against lesbians

-December 1, "Slaying the Dragon," Addresses oppression of Asian Women by U. S. media

-December 2, "Home is Struggle," Addresses the struggles of Latina women

All films will be shown noon - 2pm, Room 803, Campus Center, UMass. (Cosponsored by Casa Latina, UHS, and WW Johnson Life Center).

November 29: Lecture: Disobedient Daughters: Moral Self-Definition and Resistance in Women's Autobiographies, a free lecture by Martha Saunders of Concordia University, Canada, in the Livingroom of the Dickenson House on the Mount Holyoke Campus.

December 5, 7:00pm: Massachusetts Breast Cancer Coalition Meeting, Third floor conference room, 16 Center Street, Northampton. For further information call Ellen Koteen (413) 586-2016.

Studies in Success

The Women's College Coalition, a national association of women's colleges, in partnership with Mount Holyoke College, presents a three day conference starting Friday, November 4, and ending Sunday, November 6 to examine current research on educating females in all educational environments. The conference aims to identify strategies that work for educating women and optimizing their academic performance. Please call Kevin McCaffrey at 413-538-2987 or e-mail at kmccaffr@mhc.mtholyoke.edu for more information.

Tidings

Tidings is a news clipping service specializing in Gay, Lesbian and Bi-Sexual Topics. They track trends in news coverage of issues that are important and provide an up to the minute profile of news affecting the Gay, Lesbian, and Bi-Sexual community. Write to P.O. Box 1908, Racine WI 53401 or call 1-800-8-TIDINGS.

Menopause Support Group

An ongoing group for all women anticipating, experiencing, adjusting to, or just thinking about menopause and their path through the second half of life. Meets first and third Wednesdays from 6:30 to 8:00 in Amherst. The group is designed to help break through personal walls of silence and find mutual support in our experience. The group will explore physiological, emotional, mental and spiritual aspects of menopause, sharing fears, hopes, individual experiences and information. The group is facilitated by Rebecca Reid and Judith Harper. Call 253-5494 for more information and to register.

News Briefs

continued from page 7

Gay Murders in Mississippi

Two white men who are reported to be gay were shot in the head execution-style after leaving a party in a rural Mississippi county. The bodies of Robert Walters, 34, and Joseph Shoemaker, 24, who were both over 6' and 200 pounds, were found in the woods about a mile north of Laurel, Miss. That's about 15 miles from Camp Sister Spirit. Shots were fired across Camp Sister Spirit six hours before the bodies were found. Local police again refuse to recognize this as a hate crime. A 16-year old African-American male has been charged/framed and will be defended by the Southern Christian Leadership Conference. Joseph Lawrey of SCLC has asked U.S. Attorney General George Phillips to investigate the case. —Bay Windows, Camp Sister Spirit

Right to Kill?

Paul Hill, Leader of the Anti-Abortion group, Defensive Action, was arrested in Florida and charged with the murders of John Bayard Britton, a doctor who worked at a Pensacola Clinic and his escort James Herman Barrett. Britton's wife was also hurt. Hill had supported "justifiable Homicide" against abortionists, and had also publicly supported the murder of Dr. David Gunn, who was also killed in Florida by an anti-choice fanatic. —Off Our Backs

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